

II. PARK PURPOSES

MISSION STATEMENT FOR THE STATE PARKS SYSTEM

The North Carolina State Parks System exists for the enjoyment, education, health, and inspiration of all our citizens and visitors. The mission of the state parks system is to conserve and protect representative examples of the natural beauty, ecological features and recreation resources of statewide significance; to provide outdoor recreation opportunities in a safe and healthy environment; and to provide education opportunities that promote stewardship of the state's natural heritage.

LAKE WACCAMAW STATE PARK PURPOSE STATEMENT

Lake Waccamaw is one of the state's few natural lakes and, at 8950 acres, the largest water-filled Carolina bay. It has a long history of public ownership that clearly indicates its value as a public trust resource. In 1827, legislation passed that prohibited the lands covered by the waters of any lake in North Carolina from being recorded for private ownership. In 1911, the General Assembly passed legislation declaring that certain lakes containing 500 acres or more were not to be sold but "...should always be and remain the property of the State of North Carolina for the use and benefit of all the people of the State...". In May of 1976, a 273-acre parcel on the south side of the lake was purchased and Lake Waccamaw State Park established.

Lake Waccamaw is a water-filled Carolina bay. Carolina bays are found in the loose, unconsolidated sands that form a cover within the Atlantic Coastal Plain, with the greatest concentration of Carolina bays in Bladen County. Their origin has long been a matter of speculation and debate. Carolina bays are oval depressions oriented in a southeast-northwest direction. They are shallow, with the deepest point southeast of the bay's center, and have a raised sand rim, best developed at the southeast end. The term "bay," in this case, refers to the distinctive vegetation – such as loblolly bay – that slowly fills these depressions. Only a few Carolina bays still contain water, as most have filled naturally with sediment and vegetation. Limestone along the north shore and under the lake bed of Lake Waccamaw neutralize the water, making it able to sustain a large diversity of aquatic life, unlike other Carolina bays.

Lake Waccamaw is one of the most unique bodies of water in the world, and it has been classified as an *Outstanding Resource Water* by the state. Its aquatic system contains a number of mollusks and fishes found nowhere else. The lake contains diverse fish fauna including three endemic species: the Waccamaw Darter (*Etheostoma perlongum*), Waccamaw Killifish (*Fundulus waccamensis*), and Waccamaw Silverside (*Menidia extensa*). The lake also has rich and diverse molluscan fauna comprised of at least eight species of bivalves and three gastropods, including the Waccamaw Snail (*Amnicola* sp.), Waccamaw Fatmucket (*Lampsilis fullerkati*), and Waccamaw Lance (*Elliptio* sp.), all endemic to Lake Waccamaw. At least five species of endangered and threatened species of plants are known to occur in the lake and along its shoreline that includes several types

of natural communities. The lake and its associated habitats host many species of birds including many species of ducks that winter on the lake. The shallow lake margin provides feeding sites for wading species, while other species nest in adjacent swamp forest. Amphibians and reptiles, including the American alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*), are commonly found in the lake edge communities and surrounding swamps.

Lake Waccamaw State Park is an important regional recreation resource. The park offers a peaceful, natural setting for varied recreational activities such as hiking, camping, picnicking, fishing, and nature study. The sandy lake bottom and clear water is attractive for wading and swimming, and nearby ramps provide access for boaters. Access to the lake and Waccamaw River is also provided at the dam. The primary interpretive theme focuses on the unique ecosystem of this Carolina bay, particularly its water chemistry and the diversity of aquatic life. Recreational activities are appropriately limited to preserve the quality of the recreational experience and to protect the park's outstanding natural resources. Land and Water Conservation Fund grant assistance, used to partially develop the park in the mid 1980s, requires that the park be retained and used for public outdoor recreation.

Lake Waccamaw State Park offers exceptional scenic vistas of the lake and its shoreline as well as views of sailboats and other watercraft on the lake. The broad expanses of water, grass beds in the lake, lovely lakeside flora, the barren sand lake rims, and the dense bay forests are in stark contrast to one another. In places, beautiful majestic bald cypress trees hung with Spanish moss line the shore or grow in the shallow water. The trails offer opportunities to walk through and view a variety of natural communities such as densely vegetated bog areas of Carolina bays and pine forests. The digging of canals, private development of lakefront cabins and houses on small lots, and a road along the lake rim have altered most of Lake Waccamaw's shoreline outside the park. The park serves to protect the remaining undeveloped lakeshore and preserve its natural beauty.

The name "Waccamaw" comes from its earliest inhabitants, the Waccamaw-Siouan, who settled in the area after A.D. 1000. Many artifacts from 100 to 1700, including beads, pipes, grinding stones, dugout canoes, and fragments of pottery have been found in and around the lake.

Lake Waccamaw State Park exists so that its valuable geological, biological, recreational, scenic and archaeological resources can be protected and because of the lake's value as a public trust resource. The Division of Parks and Recreation is charged with preserving these resources and providing park experiences that promote pride in and understanding of North Carolina's natural heritage.